

Salem, OR 3/4/19

RE: HB 2970, Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and ~~McKeown~~ ^{McLain} and members of the Joint Transportation Committee,

My name is Steve Rippeteau. I am a resident of Woodburn, OR. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2970. Before moving to Oregon, I spent 40 years as a trainman and conductor for the Santa Fe Railway, Illinois Division and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway from 1965 to 2007, with time (1966-1968) in the US Army serving in the Transportation Corp in Vietnam. Since retirement from the BNSF I have stayed active in volunteer rail operations involving full sized steam locomotive train operations and repair. Most recently at the Oregon Rail Heritage Center in Portland.

House Bill 2970 is important for the safety of our local communities, state and nation. With 40+ years experience I have learned we cannot rely on technology. There must be a minimum of two crew members working as a team who are assigned to the train crew. When I was promoted to conductor by the Santa Fe Railway I was told that I was jointly responsible with along with the engineer for the safe and efficient operation of the train I was assigned to. Please note they said "responsible for..." not in charge. Can technology or remote personnel take responsibility for the safe and efficient operation of trains? No!

Positive Train Control? No!
Technology can help as a tool for improving safety and efficiency but it cannot replace a minimum of two crew members assigned to the train to be able to immediately respond to problems. This is especially true in remote areas of Oregon where these rail lines operate trains the majority of their miles. Even in Illinois where I spent most of my career working a double track 70-90 MPH freight/passenger mainline there were many cases when crew members were able to resolve or repair issues or avoid a worse scenario with a potential catastrophic accident involving death, injury and property loss.

We relied on methods handed down from not only the railroad management but from years of experience through our union and on the job training dating back to the 19th Century. We also gained knowledge from our federal government with agencies like the Federal Railroad Administration. This may sound archaic but when the radio transmissions fail, the GPS fails, the signals fail we know what to do and how to do it with a minimum of delay. We did not even need management supervision. They were not even close enough to do any good. Either they were not aware they had a problem until after the incident or if they tried to micro manage an emergency it caused even further problems.

What I think the current management of our various private rail lines believe is they can operate their railroad like a giant model train layout from places like Omaha, NE or Fort Worth, TX. Well I have some experience with that too. Yes, there have been great advances in remote control but like the real railway operation the more layers of technology that become relied on for safe operation the more they are likely to cause problems or fail.

Have you ever tried to get rail management on the telephone? Or even to answer a letter, e-mail? My experience has not been good nor timely. We already know there will be emergencies either caused by the railway or incidents that involve the safe operation of trains. We need a minimum of two crew members with the trains to act on the spot to respond to emergencies. Not an hour or more waiting for a "Utility man" to show up. Then not be able to get to the train.

I am thankful Oregon has taken this initiative on this issue as the rail industry has been pushing hard for crew reduction and elimination for many years, and our federal government has dropped the ball. So I ask that you vote yes on HB 2970 for the safety of the people of our nation. I'd be glad to give real examples from my first hand experience, but I have used my allotted time. So I welcome any questions.



Sincerely, Steve Rippeteau

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MURPHY'S LAWS

1. In any field of endeavor, anything that can possibly go wrong, will go wrong.
2. Left to themselves, things always go from bad to worse.
3. If there is a possibility of several things going wrong the one that will go wrong, is the one that will do the most damage.
4. Nature always sides with the hidden flaw.
5. No matter what goes wrong, there is always someone who knew it would.
6. It is a proven fact that if the prototype works perfectly, the production units are bound to fail.

Murphy's law does not apply when we are alert and work in a safe manner.

Let's continue to be proud of ourselves
and our accomplishments

ON

The Albuquerque Division

